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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes religious, psychological, artistic, and environmental elements in one Naskapi myth, and provides a means of understanding the world of the Montagnais and Naskapi hunting tribes of the Labrador Peninsula. In "Ayas'i's Son," the (unnamed) hero is falsely accused of rape by his father's youngest wife. The son is exiled to an island, which the father, using his shamanistic powers, has blown further from the mainland. The hero escapes the island and survives a series of trials through the help of spirit creatures in animal forms. Returning to his village, the hero uses his new-found power to transform his father into a frog and his mother and himself into birds. The main theme of this myth is the self-sufficiency of the hero and his use of Nature's gifts to strengthen himself. Analysis suggests that a magico-religious outlook on the world is dominant. Cree, Lillooet, Eskimo, Blackfoot, Aleut, and Tsimshian variants illuminate other important issues: (1) the initiation of a shaman to the "vision quest;" (2) the roles played by women; and (3) animal and bird helpers as symbols of the shaman's power and connection to the spirit world. While both religious and worldly interpretations of these myths are possible, the unified view suggests that the universe has order, and that the wise or "blessed" man will align himself with this cosmic regularity. In the variants of the far north, particularly, relentless and formidable Nature is always present and capable of extinguishing life at any moment. This paper includes 17 references. (SV)

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THE ISLAND THAT MOVES: SHAMANISTIC PRACTICES AND PSYCHIC POSTURING IN ONE NASKAPI MYTH FROM LITTLE WHALE RIVER

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THE ISLAND THAT MOVES: SHAMANISTIC PRACTICES AND PSYCHIC POSTURING IN ONE NASKAPI MYTH FROM LITTLE WHALE RIVER

Frank Speck explains that this particular Naskapi myth was obtained from one John Turner, a native of Moose Factory (a settlement on the east coast of Hudson's Bay), in the summer of 1913. Indeed, he gives a precise fix on the geographical location where the story was told: it was narrated, Speck states, "on the east coast of Hudson's Bay, near Richmond Gulf, longitude 78° west, latitude 56° north" (p. 70). He entitles the myth, simply, "Ayas'i." I have taken the liberty of calling it "Ayas'i's Son," which seems more in keeping with my emphasis on the exploits of the hero.

The view of man that results from an analysis of this myth--M-1, Naskapi, "Ayas'i's Son"--suggests that a magico-religious outlook on the world is dominant. Both terms deserve emphasis, if it is recognized that as western labels they tend to highlight obvious features only while obscuring more informative details. Such labels also are easily applied to myths of a certain type, some of which are now listed by Stith Thompson under the heading "The Unpromising Hero" (L 101) in the Motif-Index of Folk Literature. One close Northern Cree variant ("Aioswé"), which I will also use, is entitled "The Jealous Father" in Thompson's

anthology Tales of the North American Indians (recorded by Alanson Skinner, p. 116). These myths are labeled M-1 and M-2 in this paper and are referred to by the names listed above. Other variants will be listed in a similar fashion and relevant parts will be cited or condensed when comparisons are made.

At this point it seems advisable also to give some notice to the terrain, to the unusual conditions surrounding these myths, to the integrated structures or to the gestalt. The classic view of myth is that it narrates a sacred history and that it speaks of events that took place "in primordial Time, the fabled time of the 'beginnings'" (Eliade (A), p. 5). Subsequent views generally agree with this statement but add that myths also have, so to speak, fibrous strands that interconnect across large areas and that these ancient tales are strongly embedded in the cultural matrix and in the geographical region. To examine them without somehow being conscious of web-like vibrations near and far is to distort the artistic code and also the intended messages. Thus the structuralists emphasize "a bundle of relationships" (Lévi-Strauss, p. 211) or "symbol-filled 'texts' which articulate a people's 'social discourse'" (James Boon, p. 102) or simply "implicit" metaphors that must be made "explicit" (C. Patrick Morris, p. 246).

The reader should note, for instance, that there is a subarctic forest zone that stretches some 2,500 miles across

Canada from Labrador on the North Atlantic, along the southern shores of Hudson's Bay, into the Mackenzie River lowlands and north past the Arctic Circle. It seems possible that this northern arc described a story-telling route, although the dispersal rate must have been painfully slow. According to demographic studies, Canada was the least populated part of the continent in pre-contact times (Helm and Leacock, p. 370 f). Still, who is to say how story elements traveled or from whence they came.

The type of myth presented by the Naskapi story-teller, then, is both standardized and also complex. The general thrust of the story, for instance, is that the hero "Ayas'i's Son," through no fault of his own, is placed in a state of repudiation. This initial conflict is then followed by an exile and a difficult return to the community, after which the hero comes into his own. The departure, the initiation, the return--these three rather standard movements of the myth are brought to a close by a simple transformation that states in a mythical way that the action is finished and justice in a sense has been done.

The transformation that comes at the end demonstrates Ayas'i's Son's new found power. His cruel, misguided father is transformed into a creature that must creep all the days of its life, while Ayas'i's Son and mother become birds. The story-teller finishes with the remark, "That is the origin of the frog and the robin. That is the end."

For the modern reader, however, the tag ending is only one of many clues to the complexities of this particular myth. The movement away from the village, one should observe, is a signal that the first transformation has occurred. The young hero is called upon to leave his childhood and to enter the adult world, to come to terms with, in other words, the world's mysteries, its temptations, and its rewards. In a rather stilted classical mode, it is the father who is maneuvered into the role of antagonist. One generation must follow another, but the transition is not always one of gracefully leaving or of humbly accepting what is to be.

The unwarranted exile of the hero, again, should be understood as a means of moving the youth towards his initiation. The myth makes it clear that this hero is blameless at the beginning. He does not show that he is ambitious, as does another figure in a British Columbia myth--M-3, Lillooet, "Nk̂imtcamu'l"--who grew up as an orphan and slept naked beside the fire at night. "When the boy grew older," the Lillooet myth states, "he determined to become a great man, and make the people ashamed of their treatment, and envious of his success" (Teit, p. 327 f). Nor is Ayas'i's Son born with some special power as was Qauaxsaqssuq in a brief but comparable Eskimo myth further to the north--M-4, Eskimo, "Qauaxaqssuq" (Kroeber, p. 178). This hero was also mistreated by all. His mother hid him in the beds in

the daytime, but at night she had to take him out. Then he slept in the doorway or on the roof, over the lamp-hole, in order to get at least a little warmth. The myth also says that Qauaxsaqssuq was generally lifted and carried about by his nostrils, the crooked fingers being inserted in them. This hero who said little during his life was finally done in by envious neighbors who punched a small hole in his kayak. Note, however, that this physically strong hero--the myth later states that he wrestles with several bears--and the ambitious orphan in the Lillooet myth have some early relationship with fire or the lamp-hole. It is a clue usually to the special powers of the shaman.

One other myth forms a valuable contrast also--M-5, Blackfeet, "The Origin of the Beaver Medicine" (McClintock, pp. 104-12). This myth is now a part of a recent publication by James Welch, a novel entitled Fools Crow. Akaiyan, the hero of the Blackfoot myth, you will notice, shares a certain innocence with Ayas!i's Son, but it is clear that the latter hero overcomes his innocence whereas the reader is not certain whether Akaiyan does or not. Partly this difference can be attributed to Ayas'i's Son's special struggle with his father, for both heroes are subjected to an essentially similar initiation. Each is called upon to make a symbolic movement upward in the Platonic direction and downward in the Freudian direction. The terms of this initiation are

more clear-cut in the Naskapi myth, but the rite of passage for both myths involves a psychic thrust into the world of birds and into the world of frogs. Generally, then, an atmosphere of exotic magic seems to pervade the Naskapi myth; the more mystical overtones of the McClintock version of M-5 are completely missing. This difference, too, suggests that a tentative statement of theme for the Speck version of M-1 should be phrased as follows: A young man must make use of Nature's gifts in order to strengthen himself.

The last qualifying part to this theme is important for this whole group of myths, although there are slight changes here and there that could be made. The following analysis, at least, will work towards this idea of the self-sufficiency of the hero. Before examining the details of this analysis, however, a more extended summary of the Speck version of M-1 is in order.

It was Ayas'i's youngest wife, the myth says, who set out to damage the reputation of Ayas'i's son. The chieftainship would be inherited by the oldest son and the youngest wife wanted her own children to be honored with a leadership role. She kept telling Ayas'i that the oldest son was trying to seduce her, and in time Ayas'i began to believe his young wife, although the stories he heard had not been proved.

One day the young woman thought of a plan to trap the boy. She used the feet of a dying partridge to scratch

her legs until they became lacerated around her lower parts. That night when Ayas'i desired to cohabit with her she cried out, "No, no! I'm all cut up from my struggles with your oldest son." Ayas'i then was surprised. And when she showed him the scratches and wounds, he at last believed that his son had raped her and he grew bitter against the boy.

The myth now shows Ayas'i gathering the people from near and far and telling them that there was to be a great feast for his son. In preparation for the feast Ayas'i proposes that everyone gather eggs and that the next morning even his son would set out on an egg-gathering journey. Ayas'i's Son does not care to go, but his father says they must travel together the next day.

The trip does take place as planned. Ayas'i guided the canoe from the back and his son paddled in the front. They made their way toward a large island, but as they traveled Ayas'i used his power and blew the island farther away. The son could not see his father blowing; he wondered only why the island could not be approached.

The movement away from the village, of course, ends in exile for the boy. He is urged to search for eggs far inland, but when he does so his father leaves in the canoe. Eventually, as the boy wandered about the island, he meets a gull who tries to help him, who offers to carry the boy on his back. The boy proves to be too heavy; the gull, nevertheless, directs the boy to a sea-creature with horns,

either a walrus or a catfish, that gives him a ride back to the mainland. There is trouble even on this trip and Ayas'i's Son is almost killed by a thunderbolt.

From this point on the young hero faces a series of trials which he is able to overcome only with the help of a spirit creature, a fox that can readily transform itself and also the hero whenever danger appears. The nature of the trials in this myth are quite unusual. First, there are fishhooks hanging from the sky. Second, there is a place of rocks and a pathway guarded by two monster-dogs. Third, there is a meeting with two women who guard the way and who represent the trial known as the vagina dentata. All these tests are passed successfully by the hero and in every instance the spirit helper is responsible for the correct solution to the problem.

I will postpone the actual homecoming until later because already several important issues have been raised and must be examined immediately.

(1) Shamanism. In the Naskapi myth the narrator makes a point of calling the hero's father a "great chief and trickster," while the fox in this same story refers to Ayas'i as "very tricky and strong." The heroes in all these myths have some relationship with power, curing power (M-5), hunting power (M-3), physical power (M-4), and fishing power in a Northern Pacific myth which I will later refer to and which will now be listed as M-6, Aleut, "The Raven and His

Grandmother" (Golder, pp. 16-19). Each of these myths also has some degree of magical power, but it is especially noticeable in the Labrador example (M-1). Qauaxsaqssuq, further, is called specifically "a great angakoq (shaman)" in his myth and, like Ayas'i, is "much dreaded and feared." The difference between the two seems to be that Qauaxsaqssuq has been born with his power, whereas the hereditary aspect is only indirectly stated in M-1; Ayas'i's Son, that is, develops or discovers his power as the myth proceeds. The fact, then, that "special gifts" are felt to be hereditary (M-4, M-6), or that they result from training in the mountains (M-3), or that they are discovered on magical islands (M-1, M-5), suggest that certain features of the vision-quest and that certain aspects of shamanism play a part in these myths. Both "practices" will be discussed; the latter, and perhaps the more "northerly" of the two, will be taken first.

Shamanism is best understood as a product of Siberia and Central Asia, where its essential elements are more fully integrated than in any other region on the globe. These elements involve (1) special relations with "spirits," (2) ecstatic capacities permitting of magical flight, (3) ascents to the sky, (4) descents to the underworld, and (5) mastery over fire. The shaman, then, was an early religious figure in the tribe; like a doctor, he was called upon to cure; like a magician, he performed miracles "of the fakir type"; he is best understood, however, as a "psychopomp." (Eliade

(B), p. 4 ff). As a "spirit-sender," then, "the shaman, and he alone, is the great master of ecstasy."

Various reactions, mostly negative, to these older, highly individualistic shamans of the North (primarily) can be gleaned from the literature. Eliade states that Paul Radin, for one, emphasized the "'epileptoid or hysteroid psychic structure of most medicine men, citing it to support his thesis of the psychopathological origin of the class of sorcerers and priests'" (p. 26). Eliade, on the other hand, stresses the normal, and usually above average, intellect of the shaman, as do a host of others who are acquainted with the northern regions. More importantly, the distinction that is partly discernible between North American and Siberian shamanism is said to be a difference between "a deliberate quest" and a divine election:

> It has been sought to distinguish between the initiations of North American and Siberian shamans by asserting that, for the former, there is always a deliberate quest, whereas in Asia the shamanic vocation is always in some sort inflicted by the spirits. Bogoras, using the findings of Ruth Benedict, sums up the acquiring of Shamanic powers in North America as follows: To enter into contact with the spirits or to obtain guardian spirits, the aspirant withdraws into solitude and subjects himself to a strict regime of self-torture. When the spirits manifest themselves in animal form, the aspirant is believed to give them his own flesh to eat. But offering oneself as food for animal spirits, an act accomplished by dismemberment of one's own body, is only a parallel formula to the ecstatic rite of dismembering the apprentice's body (p. 108).

Withdrawing into solitude and offering one's own flesh to animal spirits should especially be stressed. The first must be seen in relation to the symbolism of the " Center,"

or to those symbolic images of the connection between heaven and earth (rainbow, bridge, stairs, ladder, vine, cord, "chain of arrows," mountain, etc.) which Eliade suggests are "merely variants of the World Tree or the axis mundi." Further, Eliade speaks of "a primordial 'situation' accessible to [shamans but possible for] the rest of mankind only through death." It is this "journey to heaven" that the shaman, finally, attempts to achieve in actuality, in concreto; and the attempt, Eliade suggests, has possibly brought about the gradual decadence of shamanism (p. 492 ff).

Certainly the yearning to experience in concreto the actual journey to heaven is understandable enough. It may be possible, also, that the shamans taught their listeners only too well, that, in short, the inevitable laicizing or secularization process was set in motion, and that, where population density increased, the "archaic techniques of ecstasy" were incorporated, in a modified way, into the value inventory of the culture. Even this speculation, however, is suspect. Over the many millennia, who can say how many "borrowings" there were or in what directions they went?

These remarks about shamanism and the symbolism involved permit the reader, then, to attach significance to certain aspects of the central myth, as well as to certain features that now stand out in the variants. First, each of the heroes, with one exception, is either exposed to, or discovers

for himself, the Center. Qauaxsaqssuq in M-4 sleeps, as a child, in the "lamp-hole." Nk̂ímtcamu'l in M-3, as a youth, huddles near the fire and later trains in the mountains. Akaiyan in M-5 and Ayas'i's Son in M-1 are both left stranded on an island. Only the Raven in the Aleut myth (M-6) can be said to be already "in" Nature; the other heroes, in various ways, cross the cultural line and absorb or take their power from Nature.

(2) The Potiphar theme. This device for getting quickly into the action of the story seems common enough; there is, however, a possible difference between its use in M-1 and M-5. In the Naskapi myth a line of shamanistic succession is in question; the conflict suggests that a new generation has come of age and that a power struggle will ultimately be involved. Tentatively, this "changing of the guard" will be adopted as the armature of the myth. Certain other points, however, need to be added before it can be realistically established as the dominant movement of M-1. Also, from remarks made by Lévi-Strauss, the observer learns to question more closely the various roles that are given to women in the myths. It would be stretching matters perhaps if the role of the second wife in the Naskapi myth (M-1) was said to be a way of "calling the future shaman." Yet, women often seem to be closely connected with or to speak sometimes for Nature in the myths; in the Lillooet myth (M-3), Nk̂ímtcamu'l climbed onto the roof of a house and spat down on the

navel of a young virgin. The fertility potential that was signified by the act was also expressed, or reflected, in his nightly trips to the mountains, where he killed many marmots; the young virgin, in other words, was a distant echo either of the Eskimo Sea Mother (Sedna, or, as she is called by Eliade (3), Takánakapsaluk, p. 294) or simply of the inland life-giving Earth Mother. Note, too, that Qauax-saqssuq in the "lamp-hole" was somewhat in the same position as Nkîmtcamu'l when the latter impregnated the virgin. Also, the concerned mother in the Speck version (M-1) is scorched by her husband Ayas'i, an act which symbolically moves her also towards the centrally located fire of any dwelling, towards the fire in general, and towards the Center. What is burnt, in structural terms, is also that which is transformed.

In the Blackfoot myth, Akaiyan is pitted against a brother, Nopatsis, who is eventually lost. A close variant of this myth, which will now be listed as the Grinnell version of M-6, Blackfeet, "The Beaver Medicine" (pp. 117-24) also has a young wife of an older chief; in this myth, however, the young lady causes the hero to act by wearing his old clothes in public, thus exposing him as a young warrior who has done nothing to bring honor upon himself. The young man is shamed into action, the outcome of which is the origin of a more deadly kind of warfare. In this myth, also, Api-kunni--for this is the name of the hero--

spends a whole winter in a beaver house. The song which is taught to him by the beaver chief is given in the myth. It is as follows:

> I am like an island,
> For on an island I got my power.
> In battle I live
> While people fall away from me (p. 121)

The armature of the Akaiyan story (M-5), therefore, is still very close to the movement found in the central myth (M-1). In M-5 and M-7 (the Blackfoct myths), however, the hero, in both instances, reports at the end to an elder of the tribe, whereas Ayas'i's Son confronts his father face to face. The primary difference between the Naskapi and the Blackfoot myths, therefore, seems to be the distinction that can be drawn between shamanism and the vision-quest. If so, then the loss of the brother in the McClintock version (M-5) suggests, from one point of view, that a physical exchange was made with the spirit world, which is to say, a sacrifice, whereas Akiyan only symbolically was "sacrificed." The "payment" that is always due, at least, may take on strange forms in the sensory language. To enter the belly of a whale, the temple interior, the cave, the home of the beavers is, in a sense, a form of self-annihilation. At least it is only the hero "whose attachment to ego is already annihilate" who is able to pass "back and forth across the horizons of the world, in and out of the dragon, as readily as a king through all the rooms of his house" (Campbell (A), p. 93).

(3) Animal helpers, including birds. If the crossing of the boundary that encircles the human zone means that for the hero an important step towards manhood or spiritual awareness has been taken, then the actual meeting with a "helper" from those powerful animal and avian tribes in Nature is an experience that can change one's life. Only after a prolonged period of purification does the event usually occur. Ayas'i's Son, therefore, speaks to the gull and rides for a while on its back. He is found to be too heavy, so the gull returns with him to the island, presumably indicating that his training is not yet complete. Ayas'i, it should be remembered, ordered his son to go far "inland." As the island itself is seen as a Center and as the search from the beginning was for eggs, then the psychic direction is upward towards the highest nests in the shaman's World Tree. The bird of the shaman, at least, is "one of particular character and power, endowing him with an ability to fly in trance beyond all bounds of life, and yet return." A shaman of the North, in one interview, emphasized this very point:

> 'Up above there is a certain tree,' said a shaman of the Tungus, who was questioned at his home on the Lower Tunguska River in the spring of 1925. ' There the souls of the shamans are reared before they attain their powers. On the boughs of this tree are nests in which the souls of the shamans lie and are attended. The name of the tree is 'Tuuru.' The higher the nest is placed in this tree, the stronger will the shaman be who is raised in it, the more will he know, and the farther will he see.' The shaman, then, is not only a familiar denizen, but even the favored scion, of

> those realms of power that are invisible to our normal waking consciousness, which all may visit briefly in vision, but through which he roams, a master (Campbell (B), p. 167 f.).

It should be noted that Akaiyan on his island also made use of birds; the myth states that he "made a warm robe for himself by binding the skins [of birds] together with alder bark."

To better understand the power that is attached to this Tree of Life, it is necessary to consider a rather different kind of hero. The backside of the "tapestry," in other words, may demonstrate the significance of a meeting with a spirit bird. Such a being in disguise is very likely the central actor in the Aleut myth (M-6).

This story from the island of Kodiak was obtained at Unga Island, Alaska, by F.A. Golder and was told originally in the Russian language. It is essentially about a Raven who decides that he, too, needs a bride from a human village after observing the wedding feast of the Chief's son and in spite of the fact that hunger and famine stalk the land. The Raven's grandmother urges him to give up his wild plan, but the Raven is determined to have a bride. And in time he does obtain the oldest daughter of the Chief, but she cannot stand the surroundings and the personal habits of her new husband and she soon leaves. She had been given to the Raven only on his promise to provide food to the Chief and his relatives. The Raven keeps his part of the bargain, but the bride and the chief's family do not keep theirs.

As another year almost passes and famine once again descends on the land, the Raven again makes a request for a bride from the people. This time he is accepted by a girl, young and beautiful, at the other end of the village, perhaps because she sees that the Raven always manages to obtain food, even when others are starving. And this girl also stays with the Raven three full days, which makes the Raven think that at last he does have a bride. He then orders his grandmother to make expensive clothes for his new wife and he announces that he will now search for a whale so that he can provide a feast for the people.

The myth describes the successful hunt for the whale and the great feast that is provided for the village. The Chief's family, however, is publicly rebuked and they are made to watch from a distance while the other people in the village gorge themselves. The final result of this feast, strangely enough, is that everyone in the village dies, some of starvation and some of overeating. In the whole village, the myth states, only three were left, the Raven, his wife, and his grandmother, and there they live to this day.

The question of who was at fault seems somehow central to the action of this particular myth, that is, the whole village was made to suffer for some unknown reason. If the myth, therefore, does pose a problem of sorts, then the listener, perhaps, is left with several alternatives which he or she may take. First, the superficial answer might be

that this myth demonstrates how this or that clan came to have the Raven as a totem ancestor. The answer would be acceptable only if one ignored certain significant elements of the shaman's ideology. It has already been pointed out that the Raven is "of" Nature, that he is ideally seen as being at the Center. The myth that makes this point doubly understandable will now be listed as the Franz Boas version of M-8, Tsimshian, "Raven Becomes Voracious" (Thompson, p. 19 ff).

The Tsimshian myth (M-8), which is here condensed, tells of a family of mythical animals that once lived when the whole world was covered by darkness. The family protrayed had an only child, a boy, who was much loved but who died as a youth. His intestines were removed and burned, but the body was kept on a special bed that was built for him. One morning his mother found that another youth, as "bright as fire," was lying where the body of her son had been. Immediately she thought that "the shining youth" was her own son who had come back to life. As the days passed, however, the parents noticed that the boy ate nothing at all. One day the chief also discovered that the corpse of his son was still in his special bed. "Nevertheless," the myth says, "he loved his new child."

A kind of transformation comes about one day when two "human" slaves who worked in the household reluctantly gave the youth a small bit of scab to eat, this being at his

request, for he noticed that the slaves were always hungry; the eating of scabs from their shin bones was given as the reason for their appetite. The expected, of course, soon happens; the shining youth became voracious and began to eat everything in sight, so much so that his father reluctantly had to send him away; the youth had "devoured almost all the provisions of his tribe." The myth continues as follows:

> 'My dear son,' the chief said, 'I shall send you away inland to the other side of the ocean.' He gave his son a small round stone and a raven blanket and a dried sea lion bladder filled with all kinds of berries. The chief said to his son, 'When you fly across the ocean and feel weary, drop this round stone on the sea, and you shall find rest on it; and when you reach the mainland, scatter the various kinds of fruit all over the land; and also scatter the salmon roe in all the rivers and brooks, and also the trout roe, so that you may not lack food as long as you live in this world.' Then he started. His father named him Giant.

Is the Raven in the Golder version (M-6) a mythical reflection of the powerful Raven in the Tsimshian myth (M-8)? The identification is seemingly made in several ways: first, by the ease with which the Raven brings the whale to the village (the Boas version states symbolically that this bird is a "master of fish"), and, secondly, by his actions when the villagers begin to butcher the whale, for it is said in the myth, "His importance was not lost on the raven, who hopped up and down the whale's back, viewing the scene of carnage and gorging below him. Every now and then he would take out a pebble from the tool bag which he had about him, and after a seeming consultation put it back."

The scene, in other words, reminds the Raven of the appetite that was given to him by humans; the pebble, perhaps, recalls the fact that he was expelled from a more perfect realm. Yet, he had asked for only a bit of scab to eat: with it had come all the human urges and drives, as well as the insatiable demands for food.

Why, then, were those early "miserable" human slaves reluctant to share even a bit of scab? The Golder version sheds light on that first mythical meal; the forces of Nature require that a number of girl babies be sacrified, or placed out on the snow, in order that the larger group may survive. The ideology suggests that this sacrifice must be made willingly; the "bride" of the Raven, therefore, is called upon to make a journey from which there is no return. This village, however, only reluctantly complied, with the consequences that, in this particular clime, were bound to happen.

The Boas version, too, gives a more precise demonstration of the "hatching process" that occurs at the shaman's World Tree. The "shining youth" is born from the disemboweled corpse, which is to say, the "shell" has been left behind in the "nest." The inner light that comes from the youth is not only a fairly good definition of the term applied to Qauaxsaqssuq, that is, "angakoq," but is probably "solidified light," that is, "quartz crystals," for this type of rock, as Eliade notes, "plays an essential role in

Australian magic and religion, and it is no less important throughout Oceania and the Two Americas" (Eliade (B), p. 139). "The Kwakiutl shamans receive their power through quartz crystals. . . . [and] elsewhere the same stones bestow the power to fly--as, for example, in an American myth recorded by Boas, in which a young man, climbing a shining mountain, becomes covered with rock crystals and immediately begins to fly" (p. 138 f). The idea, then, that the "celestial vault" is solid also explains "the virtues of meteorites and thunderstones." Such items, as well as rather "common" rocks that are round and that are found on mountain tops, "are impregnated with a magico-religious virtue that can be used, communicated, disseminated; they form, as it were, a new center of uranian sacrality on earth" (p. 139).

No significance, however, can be attached to the stone with which Ayas'i's Son strikes the Catfish; the stone is not distinctive in any way; rather, the image of a boy riding through the waves on the back of a sea-creature should bring to mind the classical Greek picture of the boy on a dolphin. There is mythical significance, in other words, in the fact that Ayas'i's Son has found a special means of transportation, that he is beginning to make good use of the animal "powers" surrounding him, and that he is moving at last away from the Center and on a homeward journey. Trials still await him; however, in this particular myth the nature of these trials, as well as the episode of the Catfish and its death, seem a

bit enigmatic, and, as myths go, a bit arbitrary. In order to clarify the action, then, certain relationships from the Skinner version of M-2, Northern Cree, "The Jealous Father," need to be examined.

The Skinner version follows the Naskapi myth almost word for word, except for the latter parts in which the trials are slightly different. Also, the Catfish is replaced by a Walrus and Ayas'i's name is now "Aioswé." The Walrus, of course, belongs to the far north; more importantly, this particular animal offers a possible clue to the lightning that strikes just as the "son of Aioswé" is nearing the mainland. The reason is related to another variant; therefore, the matter will be brought up later. The immediate problem is to determine what significance, if any, the various trials have. In the Naskapi version there are three: the fishhooks from the sky, the monster-dogs guarding the path, and the matter of the vagina dentata.

The Cree myth (M-2) changes all three of these trials slightly and combines two of them; the myth also demonstrates by another device how the listener should interpret the events. First, the women who had "sharp teeth set in their vulva" (M-1) are changed to "two old blind hags" with "sharp bones like daggers protruding from the lower arm at the elbow." Their purpose, though, is still to kill anyone they meet. Next, the fishhooks from the sky are changed to human bones "hung across the path so that no one could pass by

without making them rattle." Should anyone disturb the human bones, then a group of people and "big dogs" in a nearby tent would run out and kill the stranger, no matter who he was.

It will be remembered also that a Fox (female) was the animal helper in the Naskapi myth. In the Cree myth, the Fox is changed to an "old woman"; further, the Cree myth states specifically that the appearance of this "old woman" was caused by "a wish" on the part of the mother of the hero. The myth-maker thus emphasized the magical aspects of the hero's journey. Of the death of the Walrus, for instance, the myth states, "This thunderstorm was sent to destroy Walrus by Aioswé's father, who conjured it. Walrus, on the other hand, was the result of conjuring by his mother, who wished to save her son's life." Such statements, then, tend to confirm the fact that this myth is essentially concerned with a power struggle between two shamans, a father and a son.

The device that is used in the Cree myth to escape the dogs is a "stuffed ermine skin." The "old woman" of the myth advised the hero to dig "a tunnel in the path under the bones." The hero grows careless, however, and rattles the bones; immediately the people and the dogs come running out. The myth states at this point that that "Aioswé's son was underground in the tunnel." The people could not see him, so "after they had searched for a while they returned" to

their tent. The dogs, though, continued to search. The myth reads as follows: "At length, they found the mouth of the hole Aioswé's son had dug. The dogs came to the edge and began to bark till all the people ran out again with their weapons. Then Aioswé's son took the stuffed ermine skin and poked its head up. All the people saw it and thought it was really ermine. Then they were angry and killed the dogs for lying."

The ruse seems trivial in itself; in relation to the Naskapi myth, however, it becomes an important statement. " The presence," Eliade writes, "of a helping spirit in animal form, dialogue with it in a secret language, or incarnation of such an animal spirit by the shaman (masks, actions, dances, etc.) is another way of showing that the shaman can forsake his human condition, is able, in a word, to 'die.'" Further, Eliade continues, "Shamans challenge one another in animal form, and if his alter ego is killed in the fight, the shaman very soon dies himself" ((B), p. 93 f). Ayas'i's son, at this point in the myth, has already won his battle, in other words. His training, it can be seen, is essentially complete; he is able to travel in the air, under the water, and under the ground. He has added to his collection of animal helpers the gull, the fox, the ermine, the catfish (or walrus), and he has demonstrated that he can hold his own against an odd assortment of evil powers. Only the final confrontation remains, but, because the

"turning point" has been given, the listener now knows what is ahead. The more dramatic closing passage of the Cree myth shows that Aioswé's son (and Ayas'i's Son) has indeed come into his own:

> Aioswé's son escaped again and this time he got home. When he drew near his father's wigwam, he could hear his mother crying, and as he approached still closer he saw her. She looked up and saw him coming. She cried out to her husband and co-wife,'My son has come home again.' The old man did not believe it. 'It is not possible,' he cried. But his wife insisted on it. Then the old man came out and when he saw it was really his son, he was very much frightened for his own safety. He called out to his other wife, 'Bring some caribou skins and spread them out for my son to walk on.' But the boy kicked them away. 'I have come a long way,' said he, 'with only my bare feet to walk on.'
>
> That night, the boy sang a song about the burning of the world and the old man sang against him but he was not strong enough. 'I am going to set the world on fire,' said the boy to his father, 'I shall make all the lakes and rivers boil.' He took up an arrow and said, 'I am going to shoot this arrow into the woods; see if I don't set them on fire.' He shot his arrow into the bush and a great blaze sprang up and all the woods began to burn.
>
> 'The forest is now on fire,' said the old man, 'but the water is not yet burning.' 'I'll show you how I can make the water boil also,' said his son. He shot another arrow into the water, and it immediately began to boil. Then the old man who wished to escape said to his son, 'How shall we escape?' The old man had been a great bear hunter and had a large quantity of bear's grease preserved in a bark basket. 'Go into your fat basket,' said his son, 'you will be perfectly safe there.' Then he drew a circle on the ground and placed his mother there. The ground enclosed by the circle was not even scorched, but the wicked old man who had believed he would be safe in the grease baskets, was burned to death.
>
> Aioswé's son said to his mother, 'Let us become birds. What will you be?' 'I'll be a robin,' said she. 'I'll

> be a whisky jack (Canada jay),' he replied. They flew off together.

Being a master of fire is the one attribute that directly links the shaman to Nature's power source.

Ayas'i, therefore, receives his just desserts because, as the myth suggests, he misuses his power. He is deceived by his young wife, he symbolically moves away from the Center (the island is blown further away), and, as a keeper and user of fire, he wrongly burns his older wife, a fate that in time, and in terms of the Cree myth, also falls upon him. In the Naskapi myth, since Ayas'i is transformed into a frog, he is in essence consigned to an anti-fire existence. Thus, each incident that occurs in this myth has a logical explanation, that is, in terms of the sensory language that is employed. Further, such images as are presented by the myth need not be interpreted as mere fantasy (as Ernst Cassirer suggests) unless one can imagine that cultures situated great distances from each other can fantasize, so to speak, in a common musical key. The lightning that strikes the Catfish (or the Walrus) can be seen as a "mythical reminder," or an allusion to a more authoritative text, that is, to a variant that will now be listed as the Franz Boas version of M-9, Eskimo, "Sedna, Mistress of the Underworld" (Thompson, p. 3 f).

It would be too tedious to recount all the details of this myth; it is mentioned, afterall, only to clear up a minor point. The gist of the story, then, is that Sedna, like the first bride of the Raven in M-6, is unhappy in her

marriage to a fulmar, another type of arctic bird. When her father attempts to bring her home, however, the fulmars cause a heavy storm on the sea. They were enraged because Sedna's father had killed her fulmar husband. When the storm begins to form, then, the father panics and decides to throw Sedna overboard. She, of course, holds to the side of the boat for dear life. The father, then, takes his knife and cuts off the first joints of her fingers. "Falling into the sea," the myth states, "they were transformed into whales, the nails turning into whalebone. Sedna holding onto the boat more tightly, the second finger joints fell under the sharp knife and swam away as seals; when the father cut off the stumps of the fingers they became ground seals."

The myth shows next that Sedna did punish her father; more importantly, however, the point is made that all of the life of the sea belongs to Sedna (the Indian's evolutionary scheme extends even to this realm). If a seal or a walrus is destroyed, then, in mythical terms, it is but one of Sedna's fingers which is lost. The element of sacrifice, therefore, is expressed in the Naskapi myth; just as Sedna lost her fingers, so it behooves man at certain times to sacrifice one of his. We have seen, however, that the shaman ritually "dies": "He who loses his life in this particular fashion," the myth seems to say, "shall find it." This paradox, which belongs also to a western religious tradition, should not be too difficult to understand.

A Final Comment on the Myths

The highly structured synchronic approach that has been used in this paper has resembled in no small way a very complex switchboard; circuits that are plugged in instantly connect the listener with other continents, with forgotten cultures that speak from remote corners of the globe. Clearly, the "calls" that were placed to this unfamiliar region or to that broad continent were not exhausted; other calls could have been made. The white beaver chief in the Blackfoot myth (M-5) was understanding and helpful--why? Because--and this citation of source will be the final call on the switchboard--his name is " Che-Che-Puy-Ew-Tis" and he was once a young man quite like Akaiyan himself and, indeed, quite like Ayas'i's Son. This variant is here listed as the Robert Bell version of M-10, Northern Cree, "The History of the Che-Che-Puy-Ew-Tis" (Bell, pp. 1-8).

Should the reader "step back," finally, to the level of symbolic forms, then it seems that Cassirer was partially correct when he suggested that these certain "works" of humans have a way of objectifying unidentified phenomena in Nature. What exactly it was that myth and religion (as symbolic forms) were objectifying he was unable to say; the matter, however, is a bit clearer when the structural approach is used. The unpromising hero, the observer notices, seems to step forth here and there in the myths as a hero in his own right. In the Naskapi myth he is still functioning

entirely within the context of older beliefs; his destiny is somewhat fixed, his journey is, to a great extent, predetermined, his life is but a reflection of a hundred previous lives that were ruggedly deposited in the bitter North, and his energies seem dedicated primarily to "playing the game well." When all the variants are considered, however, then the "improvising" and the gradual breaking away from an older tradition can be noted. Nkîmtcamu'l in the Lillooet myth (M-3) can hardly be destined for the usual religious life; he is interested in material things, in appearances, in class distinctions. Akaiyan, also, in the Blackfoot myth (M-5) seemingly has no interest in magic in the usual sense; what powers he retrieves from Nature are for the benefit of the people. If he seems, finally, a priest of sorts, then he seems, also, more open about the whole process. It is only when one reads the myths of the far north that the religious and secular issues appear somehow to change. Nature, or a side of Nature that is relentless and formidable, seems unexplainably present, always, somehow, capable of extinguishing life at a moment's notice. What does Qauaxsaqssuq have to say about his fate? There is not the faintest hint; the silence suddenly descends and the words stop. And is there an answer to the question that the Aleut myth (M-6) seems to ask? If it is one of the functions of art to make reality palatable, then in certain instances all that art can do is attempt to cover up, or to hide what no

one really cares to contemplate. Only if a baby girl is not given a name is it liable, it is said, to be exposed to the elements (Balikci, p. 148 f). Possibly it is not a religious question at all, simply a matter of survival. Myths, however, deal with issues, the stress-points in a society, and they are in the business of giving answers, even if, sometimes, the question has not been specifically asked. Of course, the reader may assume that at the structural level the questions are always asked, for events and objects are being structured and defined and classified.

Should the extraordinary happenings of myth expand and like a river begin to overrun its banks, then the organizer one day will appear. He will say that the island in this myth has a purpose, that the changes that happen can be tidied up, highlighted, made clearer: the nymph Calypso belongs here, Circe there, Cyclops elsewhere. Such organizers, clearly, were also present on the North American continent. Indeed, as we have seen there was material enough to work with. But, depending on how one looks at it, time suddenly came to an end for the myth-makers, or, <u>time began</u>.

Conclusion

The view of man that results from an analysis of one Naskapi myth "Ayas'i's Son" suggests, once again, that a magico-religious outlook on the world is dominant. The

addition of related variants tends to modify this view somewhat, for features related to the vision-quest are clearly discernible, as well as a more materialistic point of view. The differences, then, suggest that a unified view must stress the religious influence of shamanism, as well as the cognate version of the northern Plains, in which case another religious label is applied. In spite of the heavy religious influence in the Naskapi myth and its variants, it is possible to give a more worldly interpretation to these myths. The hero, for instance, is engaged in a series of trials. These "tests" are indicative of human capabilities, in spite of the magical emphasis in the Naskapi myth. In the variants, the strictly magical stuff is less conspicuous. Thus, two possible lines of development seem present, the religious emphasis as opposed to the more worldly emphasis. The unified view, in any case, suggests that the universe has order and that man, if he is wise or is "blessed," will align himself with this cosmic regularity.

This regularity in the Naskapi myth emerges through the mythic acquisition of animal helpers (the gull, the fox, the ermine, the catfish-or-walrus), the hero's presumed ability to travel in the manner of a psychopomp (through air, earth, and water), and the development from callow youth to determined and capable adult (the rite of passage or the aspects of shamanistic initiation). This theme of initiation emerges directly, in my opinion, but indirectly or obscurely

in terms of Western cause and effect. An explanation of motifs adds little; a description of shamanistic beliefs and an understanding of Eliade's depiction of a sacred Center helps more to clarify certain aspects of the myth, for it is my view that the moving island is essentially a Center as this concept is described. The moving island, that is, suggests a process of psychic retrieval and the means of achieving a certain mental and secular stance in order to realize the secret attributes that all humans possess.

In addition, the art form that functions here as a myth projects a closed world, in essence, except for the exceptional characteristics of the hero. These characteristics, as they are selectively arranged, can be seen as the diachronic features of homo sapiens, the actor that predictably oversteps synchronic boundaries.

Finally, in this realm of shamanistic beliefs and psychic posturing the humanities approach is still possible, if ample credit is given to and use is made of several important scientific probes: structuralism (Lévi-Strauss), cultural-historical approaches (Boas), and religious-historical approaches (Eliade). Useful insights also come from ethnographic studies in general, especially those of Frank Speck, who has provided both a valuable primary and secondary source. Motifs, as recognized labels, come mainly from the area of folklore and the seminal work of Stith Thompson. To study closely the intermixture of art, religion and

mythology in one particular Naskapi myth is to come eventually to a better understanding of the world of the Montagnais-Naskapi hunting tribes of the Labrador Peninsula.

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